

CHAPTER 8: BLM FIRE TRAINING UNIT ADMINISTERED PROGRAMS

In meeting BLM training policy requirements, the National Office of Fire and Aviation manages and oversees several interagency and Bureau-specific training programs for BLM fire personnel. These training programs are used to certify and qualify personnel who will be assigned duties in wildland fire suppression or prescribed fire. This chapter addresses those training programs.

Prescribed Fire On-the-Job Training (OJT) Program

Program Description and Purpose

Many BLM employees have found that they are able to gain the classroom training for prescribed fire positions, but discover that getting trainee assignments to complete NWCG Position Task Books is a challenge. The Prescribed Fire On-the-Job Training Program provides opportunities for trainee assignments (field experience) in prescribed fire positions to BLM employees. BLM trainees can receive a variety of assignments to a number of different states and agencies, enhancing their overall skill, knowledge and qualification level.

Administration

Coordination of the program occurs between the BLM Training Unit, State Office fire/fuels staff and Field office fire/fuels staff and cooperating agency staffs. Assignments are made based on the trainee's needs—target skill position, fuel type, complexity, assignment length, cost, timeframes, etc.

Target Audience

The target audience for the Prescribed Fire OJT Training Program consists of BLM employees with NWCG Position Task Books who must qualify in various prescribed fire positions to meet both the organization's fuels management goals and IFPM requirements.

Commitments

Trainee assignment lengths—which vary from 2 to 10 days—are flexible and can be negotiated between the BLM Training Unit, the trainee, and the host agency. Commitments can be adjusted to meet the trainee's and hosting unit's needs prior to, or during, the assignment.

Prerequisites

Trainees must meet the training and qualifications requirements of a trainee for the targeted position and have a prescribed fire Position Task Book properly initiated.

Nomination/Application Process

The nomination process can be completed via an application accessible in Lotus Notes. To access this application in Notes select: File, Database, and Open. Select LMNI4 as the server. The database selections are: Bureau/fa/Prescribed Fire OJT Program. All requests will be automatically sent to supervisors for approval and then loaded into a Lotus Notes database for processing. The program manager contacts the trainees and facilitates the assignments.

Funding

National Office funding is available for overtime, travel and per diem when the trainees' home unit or the project has insufficient funding. Sending units will need to cover their respective employee's base 8 wages.

Technical Fire Management (TFM)

Program Description and Purpose

The BLM National Office of Fire and Aviation offers an educational opportunity for fire management candidates to attend Technical Fire Management (TFM). The TFM program began in 1981 as an academic stepping-stone for fire and fuels personnel to move from technician to professional employment levels. TFM now serves an audience that includes managers and technicians from federal and state agencies throughout the US. The mission remains the same: to enable wildland fire managers to apply the most current fire-related technology to the management of fire-dependent ecosystems.

To complete TFM, participants must attend seven modules: Module I, Math Fundamentals, is a one-week course; Modules II-VI, Statistics, Economics, Fuels Management, Fire Ecology, and Planning, are two weeks each. For Module VII, Final Project, each participant is scheduled to give an oral presentation to a review panel. After-class and pre-work assignments can be expected. Each participant is required to make a PowerPoint and written presentation. TFM involves intensive education at the senior college level; this factor should be given careful consideration when applying. Upon completion of TFM, 18 upper division credits can be applied toward the educational requirements of the GS-0401 series.

The topic of each student's final TFM project will be agreed upon between the home unit manager, the student, and Fire Management Officer. The final project is a written report culminating the learning process and is often the most challenging part of the program. The project is accomplished by systematically describing, analyzing and recommending a solution to a wildland fire management problem.

This educational opportunity is designed to improve the technical proficiency of fire specialists beyond the level that may be attained through on-the-job training.

Administration

TFM is administered by Washington Institute, a privately-owned company specializing in developing educational opportunities for natural resource managers. An Advisory Committee composed of agency representatives provides guidance for curriculum content and candidate selection. Colorado State University (CSU) provides curriculum oversight and the opportunity for participants to acquire 18 upper division semester credits that can be applied to a graduate or undergraduate degree at CSU.

The BLM Training Unit coordinates student selection and payment for program participation, and represents BLM on the Advisory Committee. Once a student is notified of his/her acceptance, the program administration, student correspondence and student tracking will be the responsibility of the TFM Program Manager, BLM Training Unit.

Target Audience

The target audience for TFM consists of current career and career conditional employees occupying positions such as assistant fire management officer, fuels specialist and suppression specialist at the GS-6 through -11 levels who intend to pursue a career in fire management. The full benefit of the course can only be realized by those who have experience in fire and fuels management. TFM is intended for people who have fire management advancement potential, but lack the educational requirements to satisfy the GS-0401 job classification series. It is not intended for people who currently qualify in the GS-0401 series.

Commitments

This program is demanding and requires about a 19-month time commitment. TFM is divided into five two-week modules, a one-week module, and a final project report. Completion time for the final project alone is estimated at between 250-500 hours. In order to satisfactorily complete the course, students can expect to devote extra time outside normal working hours.

Students will be required to sign an agreement to complete the training. Failure to complete the seven training modules may require repayment of the training costs. See OF&A Informational Bulletin 2005-033 (<http://web.blm.gov/internal/fire/Directives/2005/faib2005033.pdf>).

Prerequisites

BLM employees must have completed S-390. In addition, the following knowledge and skills are required: Technical writing course or the equivalent, basic algebraic manipulation, basic personal computer skills (Windows 2000 with Microsoft Office or equivalent), and proficiency in the use of the BEHAVE program.

Application Process

An annual Informational Bulletin is distributed (usually in April) to all Field Offices from the Director, Office of Fire and Aviation (OF&A) announcing this career training opportunity and explaining the application process and selection criteria. Applicants from BLM Field Offices and BLM State Offices submit their application packets to their State Fire Management Officer (SFMO) by the due date (usually May 1) given in the Informational Bulletin. SFMOs prioritize their selections and forward the information to the TFM Program Manager, BLM Training Unit at NIFC. Applicants from the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) submit their application packets directly to the TFM Program Manager at NIFC. Student slots allocated to the BLM are limited and vary from year to year. Applicants receive notification of their selection via official memorandum from the Director, OF&A.

Funding

The cost of tuition for all seven modules is currently \$8,600. Travel and per diem expenses can range between \$9,000 and \$13,000 depending on travel distance between the home unit and the classroom location in Bothel, Washington. The costs per student are funded by each state. The National Office will fund two slots per year. The selection of the two students funded by the National Office will be determined by the BLM Training Unit's TFM Program Manager using the state's priorities as a guide.

The optional purchase of college credits from CSU is the sole responsibility of each student and costs approximately \$191 per module (\$1,146 for all 18 credits). College credit is not available for Module I – Math Fundamentals. If a student elects to purchase these credits, they will be asked to provide payment prior to beginning each module. The purchase of college credits is not required in order for the program to count towards the GS-401 Fire Management Specialist series.

Go to <http://www.fire.blm.gov/training/blmtrng/TFM.html> for more information on TFM.

UNLV GS-0401 Certification Program

Program Description and Purpose

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Office of Fire and Aviation (OF&A), in partnership with University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV), is offering an educational program designed to meet the requirements of the GS-0401 Fire Management Specialist series. Students earn credits through UNLV, a nationally recognized and fully accredited university. The subject matter specifically targets topics in the biological sciences.

The intent of the program is to improve the proficiency of fire management personnel through higher education beyond the level that may be obtained through on-the-job training and experiences. Course work is compressed and scheduled not to conflict with peak seasonal workloads. Successful completion of this program provides candidates with 18 upper division

and 6 lower division credit hours in the Biological Sciences that apply toward the GS-0401 series.

Administration

The UNLV program is administered by the BLM Training Unit. The BLM is the lead federal agency in coordinating this program. Courses are not limited to BLM employees only; courses are open to other agencies and interested persons.

UNLV provides curriculum oversight and the opportunity for participants to acquire 18 upper division semester credits and 6 lower division credits in biological science that can be applied toward the fire management GS-0401 job series.

The BLM Training Unit coordinates student selection and represents all participating agencies with UNLV. Once a student is notified of his/her acceptance, the program administration, student correspondence and student tracking will be completed by the UNLV Program Manager, BLM Training Unit in cooperation with UNLV.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Office of Fire and Aviation and UNLV exists to provide the frame work for agreements between the BLM and UNLV. The MOU can be viewed at <http://www.fire.blm.gov/training/blmtrng/PDFs/TFM/TFMmou.pdf>.

Target Audience

The target audience for the UNLV Program consists of current career and career conditional employees occupying various fire management positions who must transition into the GS-0401 series and for employees wishing to expand career opportunities. The UNLV Program is not intended for people who already meet the education requirements for the GS-0401 series.

Commitments

The full enrollment program is demanding and approximately 15 months in length. Partial enrollment (taking only a selection of courses) is also possible depending on individual needs and ability to meet prerequisite requirements. The full enrollment program is divided into eight two-week modules offered on the campus of UNLV. One of the modules (Introduction to Biological Modeling) consists of one week at UNLV and one week of online learning to be completed at the student's duty station. In order to satisfactorily complete the course, students can expect to devote extra time outside of normal working hours.

A Program Completion Agreement and the associated Completion Agreement Procedures are available on the BLM Training Unit Web site (<http://www.fire.blm.gov/training/blmtrng/>). This is an optional agreement that may be used by the student's supervisor and/or chain of command.

Prerequisites

There are no educational or qualification prerequisites to apply for and enter the full enrollment program. However, once accepted the students are required to complete and pass the entry level course work (lower division classes) in order to proceed with the remaining upper division course work.

Candidates seeking partial enrollment may request a waiver for the lower division classes. This is possible by having UNLV evaluate student prerequisite education from previous records, specifically student transcripts which have been submitted in the application process. Points of contact for correspondence confirming or denying prerequisite waivers will flow from UNLV to the BLM Training Unit (FA-331), to the State Office representative, and then to the student.

Application Process

An annual Informational Bulletin is distributed to all field offices from the Director, Office of Fire and Aviation (OF&A) announcing this career training opportunity and explaining the application process and selection criteria. Applicants from BLM Field Offices and BLM State Offices submit their application packets to their State Fire Management Officer (SFMO) by the due date given in the Informational Bulletin (usually May 1). SFMOs prioritize their selections and forward the information to the UNLV Program Manager, BLM Training Unit at NIFC.

The program is designed to be flexible, allowing both partial enrollment and full enrollment. A fully enrolled student is one that attends all modules in sequence; a partially enrolled student is one that may need some of the modules, but not all.

Preference may be given to applicants based upon criteria identified by their organization.

Funding

The cost per person, per module for the program is \$600. This fee covers the cost of tuition, registration, books and all related course materials and supplies; the fee does not include the costs of transportation, hotel, and meals. Each course participant is expected to have completed the SF-182 process or to use a credit card per agency guidelines for processing payments to UNLV.

Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Program (WFAP)

Program Description and Purpose

The National Interagency Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Program is an educational and work experience program designed to enhance and develop Senior Firefighters in the technical series. This program operates under an agreement with the Department of Labor, USDA Forest Service, USDI Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service and is hosted by the Pacific Southwest Region of the USFS. The intent of the program is to develop individuals who

want a career in Fire Management within the federal fire agencies. It is designed to take an entry-level firefighter and provide education, training and work experience over a 24- to 48-month period that will allow that individual to reach journey level status as a wildland firefighter. Apprentices typically receive a career-conditional appointment upon successful completion of the program.

Administration

The BLM National Wildland Firefighter Apprenticeship Coordinator (NWFAC) provides information to BLM field units on apprenticeship issues and also communicates implementation direction for the Apprenticeship Program. The NWFAC shall maintain all records relating to the training of apprentices and their progress towards meeting program completion requirements.

Apprentices are hired under the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) at the BLM field units. Apprentices hired on a unit where a Commercial Drivers License (CDL) is required will be subject to drug testing.

Target Audience

The target audience for the Apprenticeship Program consists of entry-level firefighter (GS-3 through -5) at the local BLM area.

Commitments

The apprentice is required to successfully complete a residential 4-week Basic Academy, a residential 4-week Advanced Academy, a prescribed program of Technical Related Supplemental Training and a minimum of 24 months of supervised on-the-job training. The formal academy training is held at the Wildland Fire Training and Conference Center located in Sacramento, California.

Upon successful completion of all the requirements of the Apprenticeship Program, which includes the Basic and Advanced Academies, on-the-job training/work process hours, and the Technical Related Supplemental Training hours, an apprentice will be non-competitively promoted to the GS-5 Senior Firefighter level and converted to a career conditional appointment with the BLM. At conversion apprentices will have received all formal training to qualify as a Firefighter I/Squad Boss and Single Resource Boss Trainee as identified by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG).

Minimum Qualifications

Applicants for BLM apprenticeships shall meet the following minimum qualifications:

- Be at least 18 years of age (proof will be required).
- Have graduated from an accredited high school or received a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) (proof will be required).
- Meet the minimum physical fitness standards established by the sponsoring Agency for the occupation of Wildland Firefighter at the arduous level.
- Possess and maintain a valid State Drivers License during the term of apprenticeship.

Prerequisites

Prior to attending the Basic Academy, BLM employees must complete 500 hours of work (base and/or overtime) in some combination of fire suppression and/or fuels management work.

Prior to attendance of the Basic Academy, students must successfully complete the following supplemental technical training:

- I-100, Orientation to Incident Command System
- I-200, Introduction to Incident Command System
- S-190, Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior
- S-130, Basic Firefighter
- Agency-specific new employee orientation

Selection Process

Selection of apprentices will be accomplished in accordance with the applicable collective bargaining agreement, Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and sponsoring agency qualifications and selection requirements for this occupation.

Funding

The U.S. Forest Service, Region 5, determines tuition by November 1 of each year based on the number of Basic and Advanced Academy slots requested. At that time the BLM is held financially responsible for all slots requested. State Apprenticeship Coordinators must verify with the NWFAC their final Basic and Advanced Academy slot requests by October 15.

The BLM Training Unit funds the tuition cost of up to two filled slots each for the Basic and Advanced Academies per year for each state. The number of slots funded by the BLM Training Unit will be identified in writing prior to State Coordinators making their final slot request. If a state has a need for more than two slots they may fund the additional slots out of state/unit budget.

Each state will fund the cost of any requested slots that they are unable to fill. The home unit will cover the apprentice's wages, overtime, uniform costs, travel costs to/from the Academy in Sacramento, CA, and meal expenses when meals are not provided at the facility. Home units are also responsible for all cost associated with Required Supplemental Technical Training and electives outside of the formal academies.

Go to <http://www.fire.blm.gov/training/blmtrng/WFAP.html> for more information on WFPA.

